RETOLD BY Hiawyn Oram · ILLUSTRATED BY Ruth Brown

Baba Yaga & The Wise Doll

$15.99

When Too Nice is sent by Horrid and Very Horrid to kidnap one of Baba Yaga's child-gobbling Toads, Baba Yaga sees the girl coming and plans a series of impossible tests. If Too Nice passes the tests, she gets the Toad. But if she doesn't—the Toad gets her!

Thankfully, Too Nice has in her pocket a gift from her mother, a wise doll whose advice leads to the miraculous completion of the tasks. And as gifts beget gifts, Too Nice gets the Toad and the two evil sisters get theirs!

Ruth Brown offers a superb visual interpretation of this enjoyable retelling by Hiawyn Oram of a traditional Russian fairy tale.

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To our mothers

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Baba Yaga & the Wise Doll

A TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN FOLKTALE

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Dutton Children's Books New York

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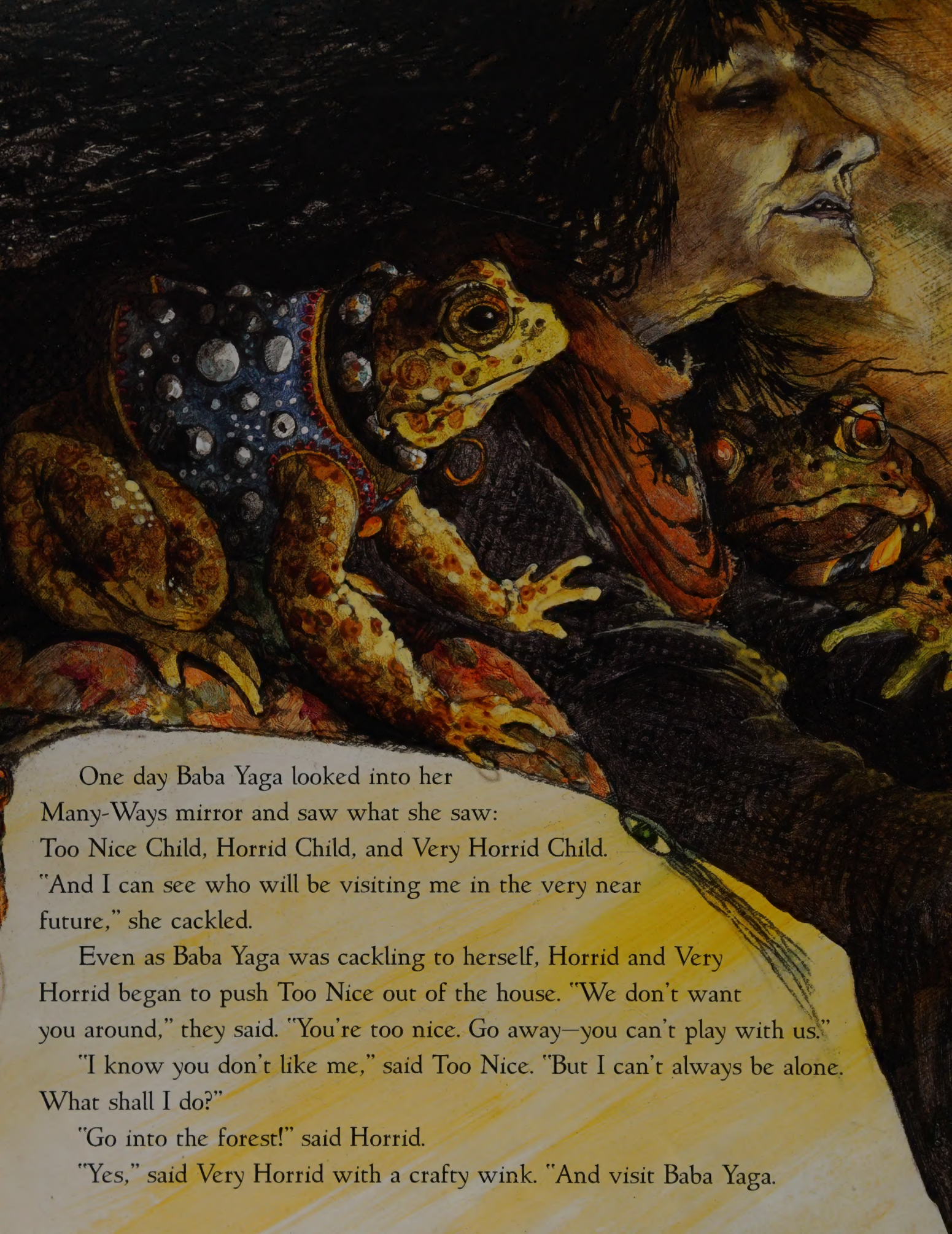
Once there was a witch called Baba Yaga.
"You are truly terrifying," her trusty Toads told her.
"I hope so," said Baba Yaga. "That's what I'm here for!"



One day Baba Yaga looked into her Many-Ways mirror and saw what she saw: Too Nice Child, Horrid Child, and Very Horrid Child. "And I can see who will be visiting me in the very near future," she cackled.

Even as Baba Yaga was cackling to herself, Horrid and Very Horrid began to push Too Nice out of the house. "We don't want you around," they said. "You're too nice. Go away—you can't play with us."

"I know you don't like me," said Too Nice. "But I can't always be alone. What shall I do?"

"Go into the forest!" said Horrid.

"Yes," said Very Horrid with a crafty wink. "And visit Baba Yaga.

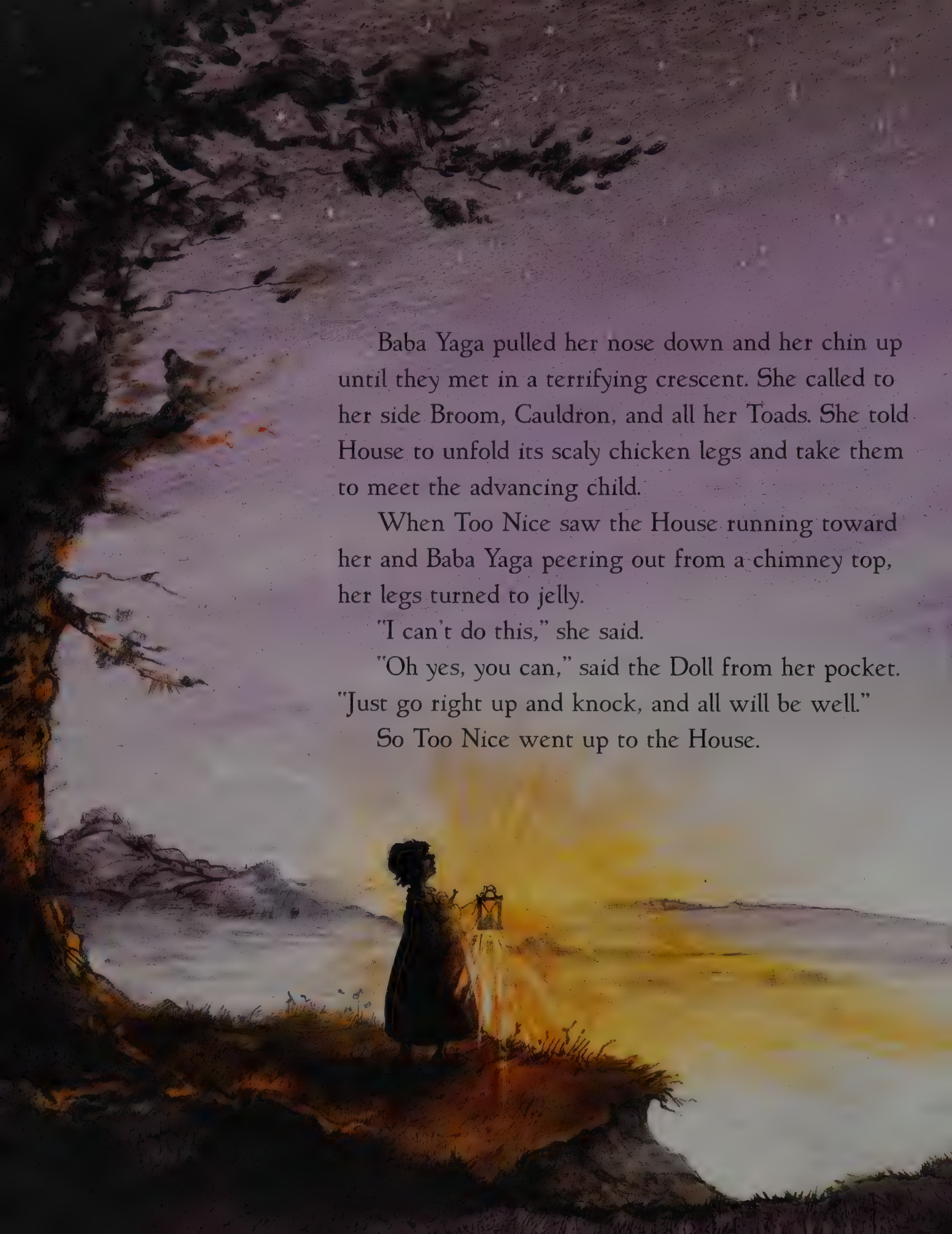
Bring us back one of her Toads in a jeweled jacket and diamond collar.
If you do that, we might play with you."

So Too Nice went out into the forest. She was all alone, except for her one dearest possession. It was a doll, given to her by her mother before she died.

"Now what?" Too Nice asked the Doll. "It's unbearable to stay and it's unbearable to go."

"No one can stay and go at the same time," said the Doll. "Put me in your pocket, listen to my advice whenever I have any, and let's be off."

So off went Too Nice with the Doll deep in her pocket. And, deep in the forest, Baba Yaga saw her coming.



Baba Yaga pulled her nose down and her chin up until they met in a terrifying crescent. She called to her side Broom, Cauldron, and all her Toads. She told House to unfold its scaly chicken legs and take them to meet the advancing child.

When Too Nice saw the House running toward her and Baba Yaga peering out from a chimney top, her legs turned to jelly.

"I can't do this," she said.

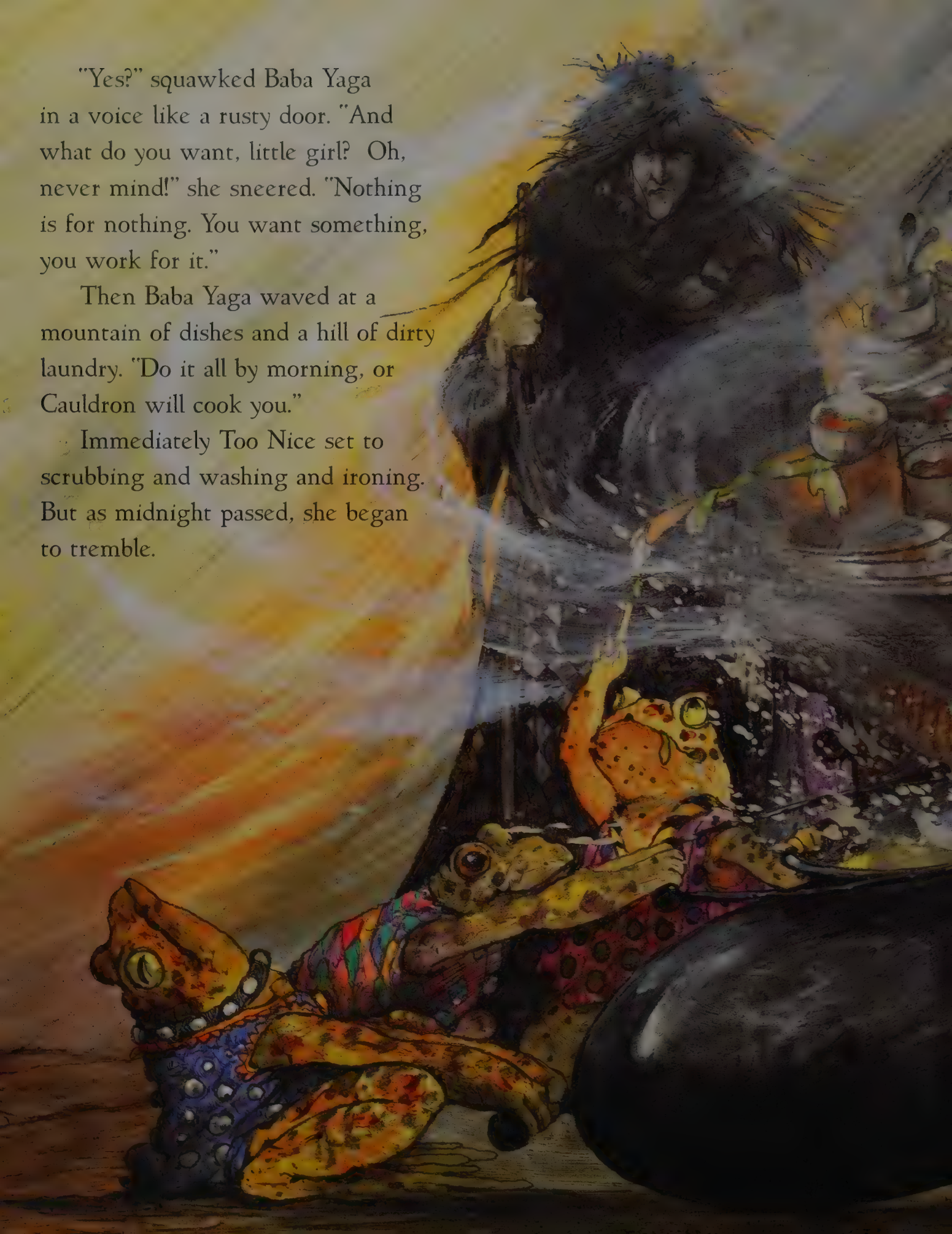
"Oh yes, you can," said the Doll from her pocket. "Just go right up and knock, and all will be well."

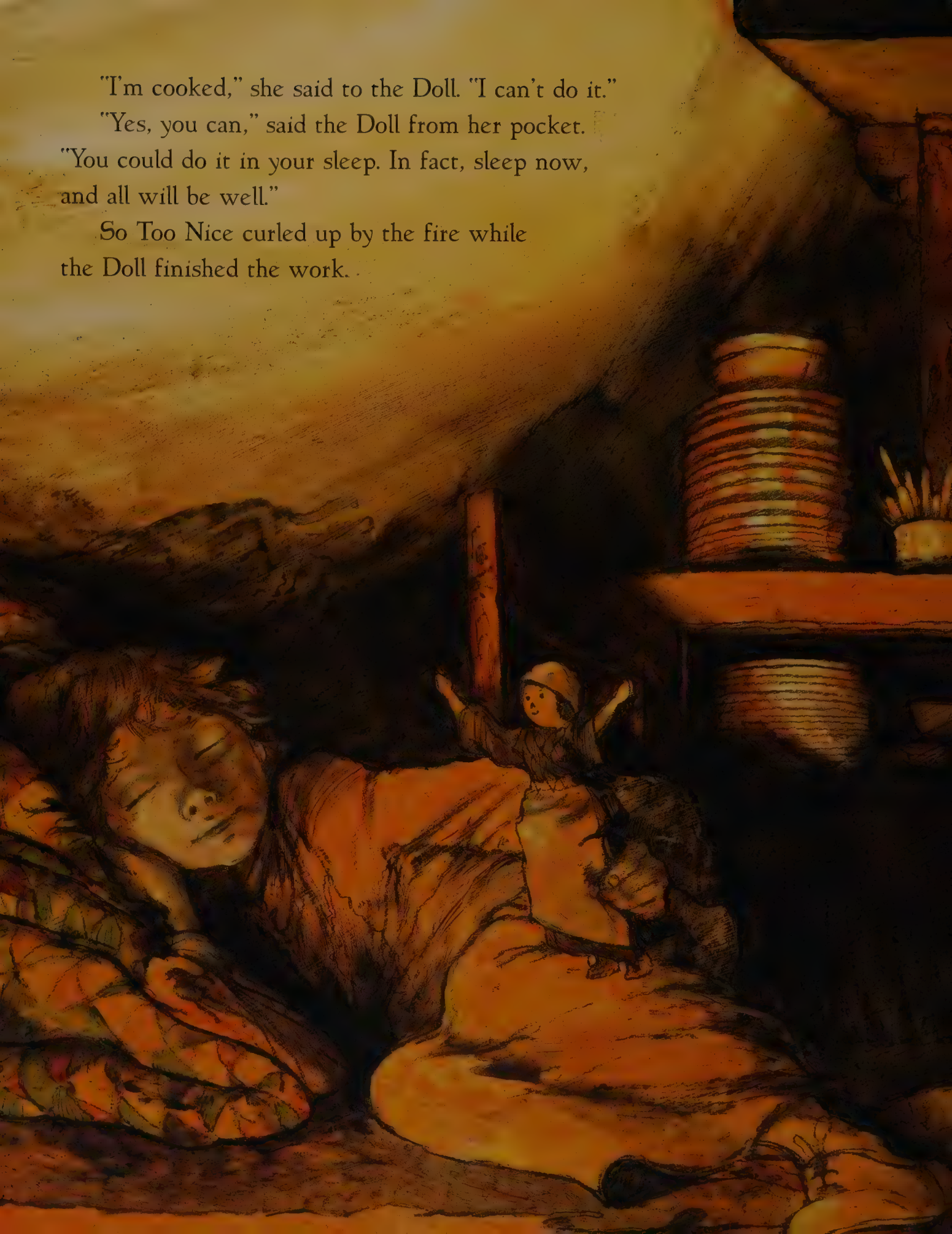
So Too Nice went up to the House.

"Yes?" squawked Baba Yaga in a voice like a rusty door. "And what do you want, little girl? Oh, never mind!" she sneered. "Nothing is for nothing. You want something, you work for it."

Then Baba Yaga waved at a mountain of dishes and a hill of dirty laundry. "Do it all by morning, or Cauldron will cook you."

Immediately Too Nice set to scrubbing and washing and ironing. But as midnight passed, she began to tremble.





"I'm cooked," she said to the Doll. "I can't do it."

"Yes, you can," said the Doll from her pocket. "You could do it in your sleep. In fact, sleep now, and all will be well."

So Too Nice curled up by the fire while the Doll finished the work.

In the morning, when the household woke up, Baba Yaga saw the work all done and was impressed. But she didn't show it. Instead she waved at a pile of dirt in the yard.

"In that pile," she wheezed, "is an equal amount of dirt and poppy seeds. Separate them by this evening or my Toads will taste you."

Immediately Too Nice got down to work. But as the sun started to drop in the sky, she began to quiver and shake.

"I'm tidbits for Toads," Too Nice said, trembling. "I can't do this. Not in one day. Not in a thousand days."

"Yes, you can," said the Doll in her pocket. "You can do it with your eyes closed and your hands tied. In fact, shut your eyes for a while, and you'll see, all will be well."

So Too Nice sat down in the shade and shut her eyes while the Doll did the work.

When the household returned from the forest at the end of the day, Baba Yaga was impressed. But she didn't show it. Instead she waved Too Nice toward the larder.

"In there is a heap of food. Lay it out for our supper, then join us at the table."

And when the food was laid out and they were all at the table, Baba Yaga's eyes glowed like hot coals.

"Now answer me correctly, or you'll be my first course. What was it you came for?"

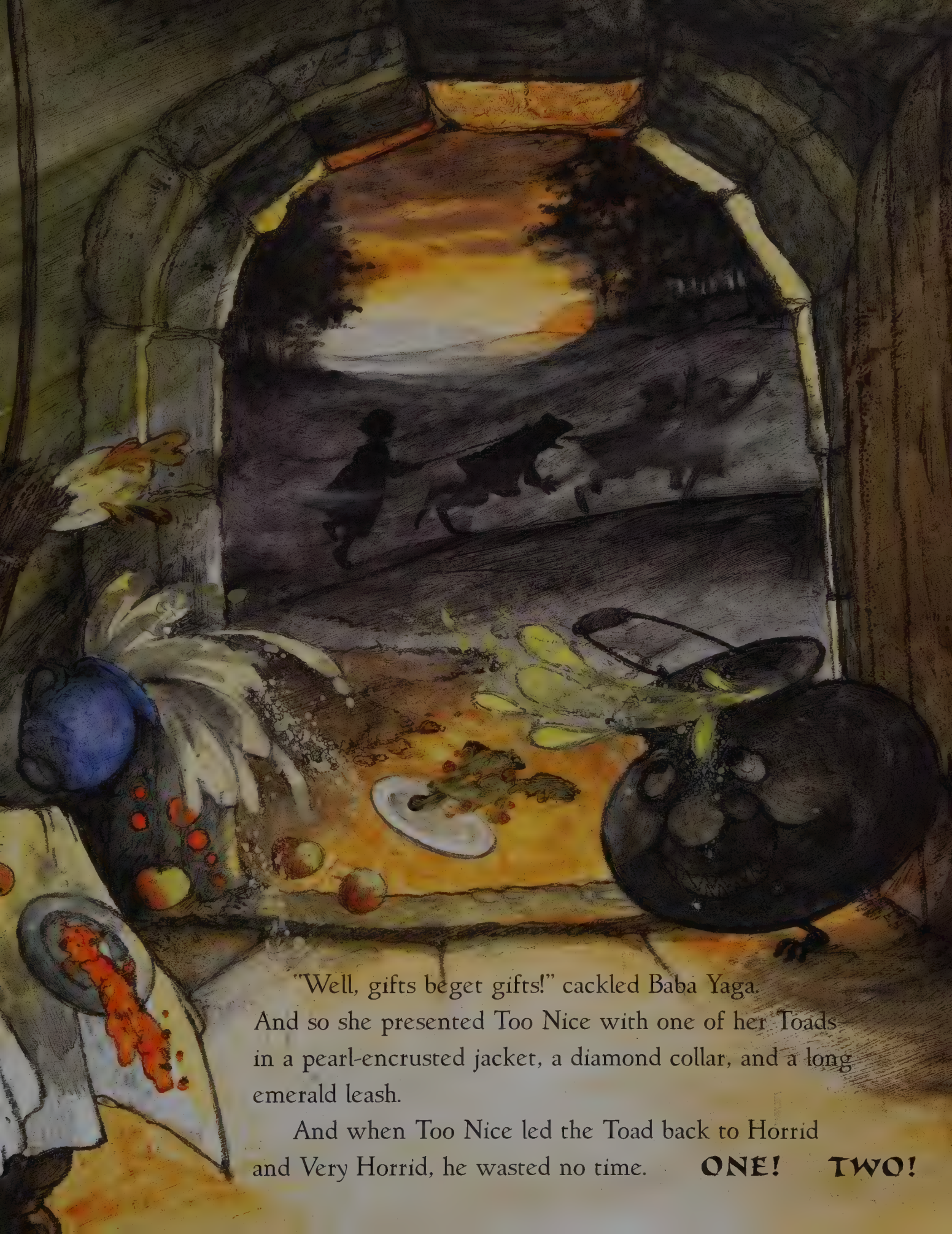
Immediately Too Nice opened her mouth to say, "A Toad for Horrid and Too Horrid."

But she felt the Doll jumping up and down in her pocket and answered instead, "To get a good scare, of course, because that's what you're here for."

This time Baba Yaga showed she was impressed. She leaped onto the table and danced, in turn, with Broom, Cauldron, and Toads.

"That's the right answer, Little Wise One Beyond Your Years! How did you come to be so wise and pass all my tests?"

"Hmm," said Too Nice, feeling the Doll in her pocket. "By a gift from my mother."



"Well, gifts beget gifts!" cackled Baba Yaga. And so she presented Too Nice with one of her Toads in a pearl-encrusted jacket, a diamond collar, and a long emerald leash.

And when Too Nice led the Toad back to Horrid and Very Horrid, he wasted no time. **ONE! TWO!**

He gobbled them up, then quietly hopped back to the forest.

And Too Nice—not surprisingly after all she'd been through—stopped being too nice and became . . . well . . . Just About Right.

Hiawyn Oram

is the author of *Badger's Bring Something Party, The Second Princess,* and *Creepy Crawly Song Book.*

Ruth Brown

is the beloved illustrator of many stories for children, including *The Picnic, The Ghost of Greyfriar's Bobby, Toad,* and her most recent book, *Cry Baby.*

Both the author and the illustrator live in England.

Ben's Christmas Carol

★ "Brown infuses all her characters with personality and emotion. An unusual and masterful offering."

—*School Library Journal*
(starred review)

Toad

★ "Brown's paintings drip with the brown and olive colors of decaying vegetation and fetid swamp stuff . . . Exquisitely slimy."

—*Kirkus Reviews*
(starred review)

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